



South Sudan – Training completed, conference suspended, new reconciliation committee

On 15 April, soon after the publication of the last Newsbriefs, South Sudan President Salva Kiir Mayardit dissolved the national reconciliation committee overseen by Vice-President Riek Machar, effectively suspending its program including the planned national reconciliation conference. An exception was the training of 200 peace mobilisers from all over the country which was already in progress and finished its work on 1 May. Mike Brown, project manager for IofC's South Sudan Initiative, writes:

Since the call went out in January, hundreds of Australians have generously supported the “Journey of healing for National Reconciliation” which was to have been launched in Juba with an international conference in mid-April, later moved to June. Eight Australians, including three from the South Sudanese diaspora, were funded to go and assist the campaign which included the training of 200 “peace and reconciliation mobilizers”.

The training went ahead (see below). But the conference was unexpectedly

put on hold by a decree of President Salva Kiir Mayardit, who dissolved the organizing committee led by his senior Advisor Tor Deng Mawien and by his Vice-President Riek Machar Teny, and replaced it on 22 April with a committee led by Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul and senior religious leaders.

On 26 April, the President received four of the team of IofC International at his office: Ginn Fourie and Letlapa Mphahlele from South Africa, Amina Dikedi from Nigeria and myself from Australia.

Repeating the theme of his speech three days earlier in Parliament, the President told us that “an inclusive and people-driven process” was needed to “achieve true reconciliation” and that those who were part of the history of conflicts through the civil war, himself included, may be required to testify as part of the process. He thanked IofC for its support and urged its continuing involvement in the process.

It was, of course, a huge disappointment to suddenly have to cancel the flights of over

30 international speakers and participants, and the nine IofC-based



International training team in Juba: (l-r) Rob Lancaster, David Vincent, Anna Pozhogina, Obas Ukoko, Nigel Heywood. Photo: Mike Brown

workshops which had been arranged for that very week, engaging many of the nation’s leadership in various sectors. But the new Reconciliation Committee has now formally asked IofC’s participation in carrying forward what had been started. And a valuable network of partners in civil society, women’s groups and churches remains an asset as the newly-

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Malaysia - tools for change

70 young people from Malaysia, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Myanmar, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, USA, Vietnam, plus Clara Cheong and myself from Australia gathered in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia for the Fifth Tools for Change Conference. Most were new to IofC.

In the mornings they experienced IofC through reflection time, skits, songs, stories and presentations. In the afternoon they participated in workshops (I led one on Conflict Management).

There were community groups,

world café and open space sessions. One evening there were inspiring guest speakers and on another a talent show.

The success and flow of the event were a credit to the host team who themselves came from many countries and worked together solidly. Clara Cheong and Fauzia Zahari (Malaysia) were our two MCs.

Many went away uplifted and inspired, saying that the conference was not like any they had previously attended.

Shoshana Faire

Farmers’ Dialogue international president

The Farmers’ Dialogue International Association has just elected its first President, Phil Jefferys, from Australia.

He writes: ‘It is with a humble heart that I accept this position to work as a servant leader keeping in mind that Farmers’ Dialogue has grown out of individual people having a vision and a purpose, in the need to ensure that enough food is produced to feed a global population.’

Claude Bourdin

South Australian elders remembered

In the last two years three respected Elders of the Ngarrindjeri nation of the Lower Murray have died.

Brothers George and Tom Trevorrow and Matt Rigney were passionate prophets for justice and the empowerment of their people, but also forgiving relationship builders for a partnership with all the races in Australia. They were friends and mentors to many in the Initiatives of Change community.

At Tom Trevorrow's funeral last month the Premier of South Australia, Jay Weatherill, spoke of Tom's outstanding leadership in dealing with government. He highlighted the teamwork of the three Elders who worked so hard for the Ngarrindjeri nation and what their pioneering model of governance meant for South Australia.

Twenty-seven years ago the Trevorrow families began to develop a Race Relations, Reconciliation and Cultural Education Centre in Ngarrindjeri country. Among the thousands of visitors to "Camp Coorong" have been young men and women from many nations training with Initiatives of Change. Conversations with Tom and George were often about the spiritual importance of respect for the land, for the animals and for each other.

For the hundreds of mourners at Tom's funeral it came as no surprise when, as the coffin came out of the Meningie church, a flock of 25 pelicans in perfect V formation swooped low over the casket to seemingly farewell Tom on his way.

John Mills

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registered IofC South Sudan carries forward its work, supported by IofC International.

So while hopes and plans had to be changed – as has happened so often in the long tortuous journey for peace in this country – the journey will go on. As my wife put it, we are seeing the unfolding, not the unravelling, of God's plan for healing in this land.

Nigel Heywood from Manilla, NSW, describes some early outcomes of the four-week training program:

200 participants and a huge cast for support means we have been a chaotic village as well as one reconciling as we go.

Somewhere in the third week of training something happened where a Spirit of change was blowing through our village. There were still complaints and people skipping sessions and all the usual dilemmas but there were also some very serious changes of heart and mind.

One man got up and stated how he thought the training had been rubbish for the first three weeks. Then he looked back through the little notes that he had taken and felt that there were a lot of good ideas on peace and reconciliation. In a discussion group he led he called up someone from another community whom he had been struggling with and apologised and asked if they could

work together. He was a communist and didn't go to church, but through the morning prayers of the Imams and the Pastors he had started praying again.

A man rang an enemy who had beaten him when he was young and asked forgiveness for his hatred.

Two men from fighting clan groups made friends during the training and made a plan to bring the two groups together (there are a number of such stories).

A priest admitted his hatred of Muslims and asked forgiveness, embracing the Imam who was present. Several religious leaders (pastors and Imams) formed an interfaith group and have been offered an office.

A lady had three people in her family to forgive and rebuild relationships with.

A senior army officer wanted to rebuild the relationship with his father.

Rob Lancaster from Canberra, also on the training team, reports:

The training, delivered by Initiatives of Change in partnership with the Government of South Sudan, emphasised the role of personal and relational transformation as the foundation to effective reconciliation initiatives. The process was participatory. The diversity

Queensland: ASSI-150

To mark the 150th anniversary of the Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) community (see *Newsbriefs*, December 2012) a commemorative event will take place on 24 August on the original Townsville cotton plantation near Beaudesert, Queensland.

All are invited! Mununjali Elders, representatives of Vanuatu/ASSI Community, the Walker Family and other landowners of the Townsville area and the wider community have been involved already in sharing stories, memories and planning. Participants include Helen Stacey Bunton (exhibiting artist), David Bunton (descendant of the Paton family of Vanuatu missions), and Abraham Lagi (exhibiting artist, cousin of Esita Seviti). Ratu Meli Vesikula is assisting to raise funds for Fijians to attend.

ASSI communities along the coast from northern NSW to north Queensland are also planning commemorations.

For a full calendar of events see

www.assi150.com.au

Lesley Bryant

of representation was one of its strengths.

At the closing ceremony, Emmanuel Lowilla, Minister in the Office of the President, brought the greetings of both the President, Salva Kiir Mayardit, and the Vice-President, Dr Riek Machar.

Conflict continues in parts of the country and Lowilla acknowledged the challenge in taking forward the work of reconciliation with "patience, perseverance and peace."

Presidential Advisor Tor Deng Mawien, the former Chair of the Organising Committee, said: "Reconciliation cannot be imposed by law. When the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed, people had to be part of it. But the bitterness remained. Forgiveness requires an individual response. It is up to me, to you, to forgive."

The mobilisers will be part of the ongoing national programme as the new committee assumes its full responsibilities. Archbishop Daniel Deng Bul, chair of the new committee, met with the participants on Monday.

(See: <http://www.iofc.org/south-sudanese-peace-and-reconciliation-mobilisers-launch-out>)

Weekend Creators of Peace Circle

Ten women added their beautiful and gracious energy to Armagh during the first weekend of May, entering into the spirit of the Creators of Peace Circle in a way that delighted us as facilitators.

The majority were professional women in the workforce. Ages ranged from 30 to over 70. The two youngest, from Yemen and from Zambia, were both PhD students in Melbourne. From a variety of faith backgrounds - Catholic and Protestant Christians, Muslim and Jewish - the inner spiritual experiences of each one's life story found resonance with the others in the circle.

The weekend format, beginning with dinner on Friday night and finishing at 3pm on Sunday, was a great success. It had the benefit of sharing meals together, and the setting of Armagh gave plenty

of space for quiet reflection. The Saturday and Sunday evenings were free, so some participants were able to go home overnight. The support of friends who gave caring service in the kitchen and friendship at meal tables added to the whole experience.

All seven sessions of the program were followed and every woman had the opportunity to share her story. For some it was incredibly significant to be sincerely and deeply listened to, perhaps for the first time.

'Desire to be of service'

One woman reflected in an email: "The weekend reconnected me to a sense of what it means to be human, and with it a desire to be of service... I am focusing on affirming the changes I observe in myself... and making an effort to be a more actively engaged

listener. The opportunity to tell my story in the circle was a moving experience. It has resulted in a making of peace with myself. I am finding forgiveness has many levels to it."

Another commented: "... enjoying the company and finding new ways of looking at life, new words for the same experience, has shed more light on how to move through my life."

We look forward to hosting more Creators of Peace Circles in Armagh.

Glennis Johnston, Liz Brumer

This article has been deleted for personal reasons.

How *The Promise of Diversity* was written

The Promise of Diversity: the story of Jerzy Zubrzycki, architect of multicultural Australia by the late John Hartwell Williams and John Bond was launched at Armagh, Melbourne, on 16 April by former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, who said Australia needed a thousand Zubrzyckis. The Australian Institute of Polish Affairs (AIPA) co-hosted the event with Initiatives of Change. Barbara Williams, the widow of John, told how the book came to be written:

John had studied English Literature at Oxford University and worked with Initiatives of Change in many countries. He met Professor Zubrzycki in the late '70s and invited him to speak to a leadership course here at Armagh.

In 1987 we moved to London where John was Managing Editor of the international magazine *For a Change*. Some of his writing and editing was around the disbanding of the Soviet Union. We met people from central Europe, and visited Poland just after the Berlin wall fell. A young Polish

philosopher lived in our household. On our return to Australia Professor Zubrzycki asked us to join the Australian Institute of Polish Affairs as part of the Australian side of the dialogue.

Arrivals in boats

Then came the change in the political landscape around Australia's attitudes to immigrants, especially arrivals in boats. Pauline Hanson and her One Nation party were grabbing headlines and I remember John being upset. He felt very deeply that the arrival of migrants from other lands was in fact a great enrichment to our society. He knew something of what Professor Zubrzycki and others had done to create a sound basis for multiculturalism here and felt that this must contribute to the public debate. One thing Zubrzycki said was: "We must honour the country the person comes from as well as the country he comes to."

John talked with Professor Zubrzycki about the idea of this book

and he agreed. He had given all his papers to the National Library. So we would go to Canberra for two or three weeks at a time with our laptops and spend all day in the National Library, going through box after box. His life had involved so many aspects, both here and in Europe.

Later John took ill and his memory and organizational skills were affected. By then he had drafted and outlined the whole book and written about half of it. A writer colleague with Initiatives of Change, John Bond, who lived in Canberra and knew Professor Zubrzycki, offered to complete it. He has written from Oxford where he now lives: "John [Williams]'s extensive research in Britain, Poland and Australia had brought together material which could make a significant contribution to the national discussion on these matters. So I gladly accepted his request to finish and publish the manuscript."

Barbara Williams

Forgiving and remembering

In March SBS showed a documentary film about the horrors of the Treblinka, a Nazi death camp whose purpose was the mass murder first of Jews, then of Gypsies.

That documentary brought back memories of the ordeal of the person closest to my heart.

When I was ten years old my mother, aged 42, was taken from Brussels and sent in a crowded cattle wagon, standing for two days and two nights without food or water, till the train reached Auschwitz-Birkenau. There SS guards beat these half-crazed, half-dead people with their truncheons to drive them to the so-called shower-rooms, where after undressing they were forced to crowd the gas chamber. There they were asphyxiated, a procedure which must

have taken twenty minutes or more.

As a child I had nightmares about that journey, when I became aware of what had happened to my mother.

Seventy years later, is it time to forgive and forget? With some exceptions, the Nazis never asked for forgiveness. Today's Neo-Nazis don't ask for forgiveness either.

I do not hate individuals

And yet, when I raised this topic with Glennis Johnston, I could not answer in the affirmative her question: do you bear hatred in your heart? Hatred of Nazism, in all likelihood yes. But I do not bear hatred towards any individuals. I realized after our conversation to what extent my presence in IofC for the last fourteen years has changed my feelings, in

order to meet and accept the other.

Should we forgive the German people? Definitely yes - the German people suffered atrociously as a consequence of Nazi policies and has totally rejected the Nazi faith of the nineteen thirties. Germany has been compensating the victims of the Nazis and the descendants of these victims for seventy years and is still doing so.

I believe we have a duty of memory. Let us never forget what happened, so that we are prepared to counteract any extremist doctrine or racism which could lead to the same horrors.

To forgive the person who has erred does not mean to condone the evil.

Jacques Birnberg

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